

VZCZCXRO5222
RR RUEHPD
DE RUEHLI #1321/01 1350818
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 150818Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY LISBON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5858
INFO RUEHPD/AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA 0329

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 LISBON 001321

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PASS TO OES/STC (ANITA EISENSTADT)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TSPA](#) [TBIO](#) [SENV](#) [PREL](#) [PO](#)

SUBJECT: PORTUGAL: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY SUBCOMMITTEE

REF: 06 LISBON 2162

Summary

1. In preparation for the May 18 Bilateral Commission, Embassy officials met with Portuguese counterparts on April 19 to review bilateral science and technology (S&T) cooperation. Discussion focused on Embassy organized conferences, the Embassy Science Fellow program, and fuel conversion at the nuclear research reactor. The Portuguese delegation also provided an update on various initiatives between the GOP and American universities. End Summary.

Committee Members

2. On April 19, Embassy Lisbon hosted the S&T Subcommittee meeting in preparation for the May 18 Bilateral Commission. The US delegation was led by Pol/Econ Counselor and included Deputy Pol/Econ Counselor and ESTH Officer. MFA Interim Deputy Director for the Americas, Manuel Grainha do Vale, headed the Portuguese delegation. Other participants included Sofia Seabra from the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Higher Education (MCTES) and Rui Vallera from the Luso-American Foundation (FLAD).

Conferences

3. Pol/Econ Counselor opened the meeting by highlighting the various conferences, all with a strong S&T component, organized by the Embassy in March. The Embassy hosted an Education Seminar, with former Governor Jeb Bush as the keynote speaker, on March 2. On March 8, the Pol/Econ Section and the Superior Institute of Agronomy organized a half-day conference on biotech crops. USDA Embassy Science Fellow Ann Marie Thro presented one of the sessions, speaking on U.S. and EU regulation processes and the benefits of biotech crops to farmers, consumers, the environment, and developing countries. On March 19 and 20, the Embassy, with the assistance of the Institute of Applied Science and Technology (ICAT) and FLAD, hosted a two-day workshop on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).

Embassy Science Fellow Program

4. ESTH Officer briefed the Portuguese delegation on the accomplishments of the Embassy Science Fellow (ESF) Program. Since the last Bilateral Commission, the Embassy hosted two additional Fellows) Larry Suter from the National Science Foundation and Ann Marie Thro from the U.S Department of Agriculture. The current Fellow, Liz Williams from NASA, will be in Portugal until May 27 focusing on public outreach and promoting links between Portuguese institutions and NASA. Pol/Econ Counselor noted that, due to the upcoming Portuguese presidency on the European Commission, the Embassy does not plan to host any additional fellows until January 2008.

5. As a result of the ESF program, several new S&T

cooperative initiatives have been launched. Discussions between Kathleen Collins, from the National Institutes of Health, and FLAD during her September/October 2006 fellowship resulted in the creation of a three-year conference series on tropical diseases. The conferences aim to bring together American and lusophone researchers working on the prevention, detection, and treatment of infectious diseases in Africa. The first conference, focusing on tuberculosis, is scheduled for October 2007 in Lisbon and will grant six 10,000 euro research awards. Another new collaboration developed with the assistance of USDA, s Ann Marie Thro concerns the creation of a new rice germplasm exchange program between the U.S. National Plant Germplasm System and Portuguese plant research institutions.

Nuclear Reactor Fuel Conversion

¶6. Following procedural delays reported during the last Bilateral Commission (reftel), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the GOP, and the USG signed the Project and Supply Agreement in December 2006 to convert the highly-enriched uranium (HEU) to low enriched uranium (LEU) at the Portuguese Investigation Reactor. On January 25, the Council of Ministers approved the agreement, and it was published in the Diario da Republica on April 5. The Portuguese Technological and Nuclear Institute (ITN) and the Department of Energy agreed on a new deadline of May 31, 2007 for the termination of HEU, with the conversion to LEU to occur in June. Both sides expressed satisfaction that the issue had been resolved.

Agreements with American Universities

¶7. The MCTES representative updated the S&T Subcommittee on
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the status of collaborative university agreements under the Prime Minister's Technology Plan. In October, Prime Minister Socrates signed agreements with both the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), focusing on engineering and management, and with Carnegie-Mellon University, centering on communication and information technology. The MCTES Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) recently called for nominations for graduate students to study in the United States as part of the Portugal-MIT joint PhD program (Note: FCT already funds 320 Portuguese PhD students and over 90 post-doctorates to study in American universities). On March 2, MCTES and the University of Texas/Austin entered an agreement to collaborate on digital media and S&T commercialization activities. Expanding the scope to new universities, on April 16, MCTES signed a MOU with Harvard Medical School to perform an assessment of possible areas of cooperation.

Comment

¶8. The S&T Subcommittee Meeting yielded no surprises. Both sides expressed satisfaction with the level of cooperation and the number of activities undertaken during the last six months. The Portuguese delegation strongly endorsed the Embassy Science Fellows program but understood that the demands of the upcoming EU Presidency would affect the number of Fellows and the scope of S&T cooperation for the rest of the year.
O'Neal